

A tough puzzler for Lee

By **MIKE WHITESMAN**

Wycombe Wanderers O, Tooting and Mitcham O

WYCOMBE WANDERERS left their Loakes Park followers, Wycombe wonderers—wondering exactly what makes a team that can, and has, overrun the best of Isthmians, allow the kind of point robbery mundane Tooting contrived on Saturday.

Coach, Brian Lee must solve this puzzler before his band can hope to offer a concerted push for the League Crown next season; already it has virtually cost Wycombe the 1968-69 title.

For, although theoretically the chase after Enfield is still on, realistically it ended weeks ago with Wanderers' failure to claim full points from teams buried in the competition's basement zone.

During a contrary term in which clubs the calibre of Leytonstone, Sutton, Hendon, Hitchin and Oxford have all felt Wycombe's wrath, such inconsistency against less prominent opposition has weakened their cause now, when the crunch is imminent.

The question after Saturday's unspectacular but sufficiently entertaining proceedings was clear. Did Tooting deserve the half-share they had obviously set out from South London to get, or did Wycombe generously give it away?

Yet there is no denying that under an overcast sky, Wanderers could, should, and certainly would, have broken the deadlock begun by a 2-2 draw earlier in the season at Sandy Lane while Tooting lay bottom of the League.

And, but for a severe case of itchy feet at a number of vital moments, Wycombe would have had a lot more to show for 80 per cent of the play.

The visitors banked almost everything on a 4-2-4 formation, tight in defence, but generally ineffective elsewhere; the gamble paid off handsomely.



KEITH SAMUELS . . .
went close on a number of occasions

As was only to be anticipated, Wycombe pressure dominated with the visitors restricted to sudden breakaways. However it was in mid-half that Wanderers really turned on the heat to cause momentary confusion in the Tooting area after 25 minutes. Fairbrother, a late replacement in goal, and the giant centre-half Gaston, seemed to impede each other, leaving the 'keeper to pounce in desperation a split second before Keith Samuels could intercept.

Two minutes later Viv Busby, brought in for the injured Peter Slater on the left flank, hastened a splendid chance over the bar, after a vintage example of a quick-moving build up at its best.

Another two minutes and 'Sammy' burst up the left, crossed inside for Thomas who headed on to Worley for a further inglorious miss as the number seven headed wide across the face of the net when well placed.

In retaliation, Hutchins swivelled round to slam a hard 15 - yarder, which Maskell bravely tipped over his bar for a corner after 32 minutes.

But twice more before the interval, Samuels went close. Six minutes from the whistle he had a testing overhead kick palmed for a corner which in turn was deadened in a defensive pack. And in the dying seconds, he too shot over the woodwork opting for a first-time attempt.

Both substitutes appeared in the second half, Garofall coming on for Pardey after 67 minutes, and Lou Temel making a welcome return after injury for the final 15 minutes, while Stevenson bowed out with head held high having done everything asked of him during his three-week initiation into the top flight.

The pace quickened as Wanderers realised the time limitation now facing them. Samuels headed over from a Worley cross, and Fairbrother smothered Busby's bullet after a darting run had looked promising.

Three minutes from time, Worley again supplied the opportunity, this time for Barry Baker. But the little number eight suddenly wandered to thoughts of Twickenham with a hopelessly high first-time shot.

Never far from the limelight, Worley was still to be carried off dragging his left leg after a collision with Holder, and return before the final whistle, which seemed to encompass an over-generous spell of injury-time.